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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ALLEGED COUP PLOT THWARTED IN GHANA: SEVEN ARRESTED

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) On November 6, the Ghanaian Criminal Investigative Division (CID) arrested seven men for allegedly engaging in 'coup plotting'. Local press reports are conflicting on whether there were current and/or active members of the military among the seven arrested. The head of the CID, Mr. David Asante-Apeatu, issued a press release saying that the men were "planning to commit acts of sabotage and subvert the state." He denied allegations that there were any active military members or former officers arrested. One news source reported that four of the seven have been released on bail, but this has yet to be confirmed by local authorities. End summary.

ALLEGED COUP PLOT THWARTED: POSSIBLE MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

12. (SBU) A group of seven men were arrested on November 6 for allegedly plotting a coup to overthrow the current government and disrupt national elections planned for December 7. According to a press release from Mr. Asante-Apeatu, head of the CID, the alleged coup plotters were found with military equipment, a firearm, and ammunition.

13. (U) Press reports about the military connections of those arrested are conflicting. The Ghanaian Times, a state-owned newspaper considered to be one of the more reliable dailies here, reported that there were both "serving and retired military personnel" among the group arrested. The Ghana Review International also quoted a high-level source from the president's office as saying that the group included "serving and retired military personnel." However, other press reports either do not address this allegation or dispute it. Mr. Asante-Apeatu is quoted in a Reuter's story as saying, "I want to emphasize that what we've uncovered had nothing to do with the armed forces. The group we arrested on Saturday consists of civilians or ex-soldiers."

14. (SBU) No names have been released to the public. However, three of the four suspects were reportedly detained previously on similar allegations and eventually released (Note: These three are among the four who are alleged to be former military members). A Pol contact reported that the police found no weaponry when they searched the suspects' residences.

15. (U) One radio station, Joy News, reported that four of the seven have been granted bail, though this has not yet been confirmed by local authorities or other press outlets. Under Ghanaian law, the suspects can be held for 48 hours to allow for initial investigations. If they are not brought before a court within 48 hours of arrest, then they must be freed.

DESPITE SECURITY THREATS, THE SITUATION IS CALM

16. (U) Despite this latest incident, the security situation in Ghana remains calm. There is no evidence of heightened military or police presence as a result of the weekend's arrests. In his press release, Mr. Asante-Apeatu reassured the public that the authorities had been effectively monitoring the threat and had reacted appropriately. In a separate address in Kumasi, the Minister of Defense, Dr. Kwame Addo-Kufuor, further upheld the Ghana Armed Forces as being ready to protect and defend the Ghanaian constitution.

17. (U) One local press report quoted an unnamed member of the major opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), as denouncing the alleged coup plot as a 'fabricated' scare tactic by the ruling National Patriotic Party to gain political leverage in the final weeks before the election. (Note: This opinion appears to be an isolated one, and its credibility is further reduced by the fact that no NDC representatives have gone on the record saying this).

COMMENT

18. (SBU) In the lead-up to this year's presidential and parliamentary elections, isolated rumors and incidents of violence have cropped up. Regional violence related to chieftancy disputes in the north continues to be a concern for many. Scattered rumors of mercenaries and coup plotters have previously been denied by both major political parties, though may/may be partially verifiable by the November 6 arrests. In spite of these isolated incidents, however, a full-scale political coup in Ghana seems unlikely and the prospects for free and fair elections in December remain optimistic at this point in time. End comment.
YATES